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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT URIBE REVOKES FARC OUTREACH, URGES
CAPTURE OF PARAS

Summary

¶1. On October 20, President Alvaro Uribe publicly held the FARC responsible for an October 19 car bomb attack in Bogota and revoked GOC outreach efforts to the terrorist organization. He called for the military to redouble efforts to rescue hostages and urged security forces to capture paramilitaries who had not turned themselves in. He also denounced continuing corruption within the security forces. Bogota-based media criticized Uribe's decision to break off outreach, a position echoed most strongly by families of the FARC hostages, but public opinion is behind the decision. End summary.

Uribe Blames FARC for Attack, Cuts Outreach

¶2. On October 20, President Uribe revoked GOC outreach efforts to the FARC as long as they committed terrorist actions. Uribe delivered his remarks from the Nueva Granada military university in Bogota, the location of a car bomb explosion the previous day that left 23 injured and which Uribe attributed to the FARC. On October 23, Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos said intelligence information left no doubt that a FARC urban militia was responsible for the attack. Uribe said the FARC had misinterpreted his moderate language on the possibility of pursuing a "humanitarian exchange" of hostages for imprisoned FARC terrorists as a sign of weakness.

¶3. The President called on the security forces to strengthen intelligence and military operations to rescue all of the FARC's hostages. He urged them to clear out FARC militia from the Valle municipalities of Florida and Pradera, frequently discussed as the site of a possible GOC-FARC negotiation.

Action Required Against Paramilitaries, Narcos

¶4. Uribe also denounced paramilitaries who had not yet turned themselves in as part of the peace process and urged the security forces to capture them. He specifically called for Vicente Castano's capture. Uribe also insisted the security forces pursue the emerging criminal groups active in the wake of demobilization and ex-paramilitaries who commit new crimes, saying, "Their total defeat is required." Using language similar to that against the FARC, Uribe said the GOC had been generous with demobilization terms and now had to be severe on ex-paramilitary recidivists. Uribe praised the recent seizure of a large shipment of cocaine but said it was more important to dismantle the cartels that produced the drugs.

Colombian Democracy Deserves Support

¶5. The President said Colombia's democracy deserved neighboring countries' support; if Colombia did not defeat terrorism, neighbors would have to confront terrorists more directly. He urged the international community to focus assistance on military and intelligence cooperation. Uribe will reportedly immediately move forward with plans to seek congressional approval of an additional 1.2 percent temporary war tax on assets in excess of USD 200,000 to raise about USD 4 billion for the security forces.

¶6. Uribe said members of the security forces who were not committed to the fight against terrorism and narcotics trafficking must resign; any of them involved in criminal activities must be jailed. He emphasized that the hard work of the security forces would not be deflected or undermined by those isolated cases.

Media Critical, Public Favors

¶7. Most Bogota-based media commentary criticized Uribe's revocation of GOC outreach to the FARC, saying he should not have closed the door to further discussions. French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy was quoted as saying France opposed attempts to rescue the hostages by force. Families of FARC hostages were most critical and promised a protest march. Still, polling data showed the public largely supported Uribe's decision.

DRUCKER